

## **WHY IS CHILD SUPPORT IMPORTANT?**

It is hard to underestimate the importance of child support. Over 22.9 million children are eligible to receive child support in the United States today, with almost half a million in Virginia alone. One in every four children in the United States is owed child support on a permanent basis. One in two children--every other child in the United States, and at some point before their eighteenth birthday--is eligible to receive child support.

Over eighty-four billion dollars in unpaid child support is owed in the United States. Approximately forty percent of the children receive the full amount of child support they are owed. Over thirty percent of the children receive no child support at all. Everyone wins if child support is paid—the custodial parent is more likely to keep the child out of poverty, the noncustodial parent will become more involved in his or her child's life and avoid the consequences of not paying child support, the taxpayers will not have to support children whose parents refuse to pay and, most of all, the children win.

Whether a child receives the support he or she is owed can determine if the child will live in poverty. Non-payment of child support is a leading cause of child poverty and is the greatest source of financial insecurity for families in the United States. Studies have shown that a child of a single parent is five times more likely to be poor than the child of married parents. Over a third of all children who are supposed to receive child support live below the poverty level and participate in at least one public assistance program. Children who live in poverty are more at risk of inadequate nutrition, substance abuse, decreased educational achievement, increased criminal behavior, physical abuse, and teenage pregnancy. The possibility of a child escaping poverty often depends on whether or not the owed child support is being paid. Child support often equates to almost a third or more of the income needed to support these children. Children who receive their child support do better in school, and they are more likely to finish high school and attend college.

Who wins when parents pay their child support obligations? The children benefit the most, but everyone wins when child support is paid. Custodial parents are more likely to keep the child out of poverty and noncustodial parents become more involved in their children's lives and avoid the consequences of not paying child support